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*The Meaning and Etymology of the Vedic Word vidátha.*<sup>1</sup>—By  
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THE interpretation of words that are restricted in their occurrence to the poetic parts of the Veda is often a delicate task, even where the word is a very common one, as is the case with the subject of the present paper. The hieratic mysticism of the diction, that swollen utterance—a less severe expression seems inadequate—tends to inflate many words with esoteric shades of meaning which becloud their original value; in sober surroundings the same word would presumably betray its meaning almost of itself. The scene of the Vedic Rishis' imaginings is both earth and heaven, the persons both men and gods; frequently an inextricable blend of the two pairs, divine men upon earth and very earthly gods in heaven, obfuscate the situation still further. In the first interpretation of the Veda the inflation and vagueness of the original were reinforced by the very natural tendency to dress out the Veda in evenly consistent poetic clothes, even where the original stooped to state the plainest matters in the commonest language. I may refer by way of illustration to my remark on *jāgrvánsah* in JAOS. xvi. p. 36, note, which means simply 'having waked up' (in the morning): the Pet. Lex. renders it, 'munter, eifrig, unermüdlich'; Grassmann, 'die wachsam sind'; Ludwig, 'die wachen' (in the sense of 'wide-awake, keen'). Such subtle shifts are common, and they betray the picture conveyed by the Veda to the mental retina of the early translators, as a kind of mediæval romantic poetry, in which naively pious sentiments and performances alternate with valorous deeds. This is what renders Grassmann's translation, the most complete and

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<sup>1</sup> Since this was written Vedic interpretation has been enriched by Professor Oldenberg's scholarly 'Vedic Hymns,' SBE. xlvi. On pp. 26 ff. he analyses the word as *vi-dátha* for *vi-dhátha* from the root *dhā*, assuming the meanings 'distribution, disposition, ordinance,' and then 'sacrificial ordinance, sacrifice.' Aside from the problematic etymology, I have not been able to convince myself that he reaches the root of the matter, especially as regards the homelier aspects of the word which form the starting-point of the present discussion.

consistent expression of this conception of the Veda, in spite of many merits in detail, a medium full of refraction, in which the prismatic tints lend a fictitious beauty that overlays the original, which after all has a beauty of its own, though it is severer, and far from even.

In the case of *vidátha* the older translations have presented as the most prominent rendering the word ‘opferversammlung.’ One fairly sees the people moving in solemn procession to the sanctified spot where chanting priests with robe and tiara are to invoke the favor of the gods. Unfortunately the Hindus had no ‘opferversammlungen’; there was in the main no public cult; the sacrifice is strictly a private affair, a sacrifice in the home of, and in behalf of an individual sacrificer. There is always one *yajamāna*, or bestower of the sacrifice; the sacrifice redounds to his benefit, and that of his family.<sup>1</sup> There were, to be sure, priests, sometimes very many, at the sacrifice, but this does not constitute an assemblage in the ordinary sense of the word, at least not in the sense which naturally goes with the word ‘opferversammlung.’ This implies, unless defined to the contrary, a rather spontaneous, popular gathering. Now this *πρώτον ψεύδος* gave rise to another faulty view of the word: it contains the root 2. *vid*, as we shall endeavor to show, in its ordinary sense of ‘get, acquire.’ Instead of this, the radical idea underlying the word was generally felt to be ‘come together, assemble’ (as though it were *sám vid*), and upon this a number of subsidiary meanings of the word were based. And, again, the false start from the notion of ‘assemblage’ resulted in an approximation of the word to other words for assemblage, especially *sabhā* with which *vidátha* was almost identified. We shall see that there are decided points of contact between the words *vidátha* and *sabhā*, but the contact is that of extreme opposites in a way: *vidátha* refers to home matters; *sabhā* generally, though not always, to public matters.<sup>2</sup>

In the interpretation of a term that figures prominently in the mystic-hieratic sphere of the Veda it is peculiarly necessary to

<sup>1</sup> See Barth, *Religions of India*, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> The word *sabhā* itself does not by any means always refer to a public place, but occasionally means simply ‘house,’ or ‘parlor.’ Thus *rayiḥ sabhāvān*, RV. iv. 2. 5, means ‘wealth consisting of houses,’ and the *yóṣā sabhāvatī vidathyā*, RV. i. 167. 3, certainly does not refer to a woman in the assembly, but means ‘a genteel woman of good house and with an establishment.’

search for its uses outside of that sphere, if there be such uses. In RV. x. 85. 26 the bride after the wedding-ceremony proper, as the newly married couple are about to travel to their new home, is addressed with the words: " May Pūṣan taking thee by the hand lead thee home, may the Aśvins lead thee forth on their car ! Go to thy house in order that thou mayst be mistress of the house," and next, *vacīnī tvám vidátham ā vadāsi*: " Full of authority shalt thou speak to the *vidátha*."<sup>1</sup> Now *vidátha* here can have but one meaning, 'household,' or something very like it. It certainly cannot refer to anything in the nature of a public gathering similar to the *sabhbā*. In AV. vii. 38. 4 a woman who is pronouncing a love-charm takes especial pains to define the position of her sex, and to disclaim any connection with public matters : " My speech, not thine (in this matter of love) hath weight ; in the assembly (*sabhāyām*), forsooth, do thou make thy voice heard ! To me alone shalt thou belong, shalt not even discourse of other women." And the Māitrāyanī-Saṁhitā iv. 7. 4 : 97. 15 defines the same relation of the sexes from the man's point of view with the utmost neatness, *nirindriyā strī, pumān indriyavāns, tasmād pumānsaḥ sabhām yanti na striyah*: " Woman is weak, man is strong ; hence men go to the assembly, not women." These passages outline the state of the woman-question for early India with the most satisfying clearness: while in general there are no footprints of the slipper in the sand of time,<sup>2</sup> and both women and men are agreed that the legislative assembly is not the ideal sphere of woman, yet her own essential prerogative of being in charge of love and home is undisputed.

The stanza in the RV. following that commented upon above, RV. x. 85. 27=AV. xiv. 1. 21=Āpast. Mantrabr. i. 9. 4, addresses a similar statement to both parties to the marriage contract : " Unite thyself with this husband, then shall ye, long-lived, order your household" (*jīvṛi vidátham ā vadāthah*). Here the word 'long-lived' is significant: it is obviously a word redolent of family-life, not of public life. And what else but the household might that thing be which man and wife shall address or order ? Similarly, AV. xii. 2. 30<sup>d</sup>, folks returning from a funeral

<sup>1</sup> Cf with this perhaps also RV. i. 167. 6.

<sup>2</sup> An occasional Xantippe was not wanting, else there would be no occasion for the Ait. Br. iii. 24. 7=Gop. Br. ii. 3. 22 to say, *aprativādinī hā 'syā grheṣu patnī bhavati yatrāi 'vām vidvān*, etc.: " His wife does not contradict him in his (own) house who knoweth thus."

pray that having succeeded in checking the advance of death upon themselves, they shall continue to live (long) and order their household (*átha jīvásō vidátham á vadema*). This again leads over to the common expressions, *suvíráso vidátham á vadema* (RV. i. 117. 25, etc.), and *bṛhád vadema vidáthe suvíráh* (RV. ii. 1. 16, etc.). Common as these two verse-lines are, they have been charged with over-much meaning, as when Grassmann renders the latter by, “*lasst laut im Chor bei dem Fest uns singen.*” Ludwig’s rendering, “*laut mögen wir sprechen mit guten helden in der opferversammlung*” is far more sober, but also misses the point, as does also Bergaigne, Quarante Hymnes, p. 6, “*puissions-nous, en parlant à voix haute dans l’assemblée, obtenir de bons héros.*” And Oldenberg (SBE. xlvi. pp. 26 ff.) arrives at a similar rendering for these expressions, e. g. in his translation of RV. ii. 1. 16 (p. 188), “*may we speak loud in the assembly, rich in valiant men.*” The word *suvíráh* again refers to family-relations, not to public life, meaning, ‘having strong, or lusty, sons’: its rendition by ‘rich in valiant men’ is once more, in our judgment, a romantic or inflated one, suggesting vaguely a feudal picture of life (a lord with his vassals) foreign to the situation.

The two verse-lines mean, “let us have strong sons and control our household.” Similarly this scene from ordinary life is reflected in the prayer for life after death, AV. xviii. 3. 70: “*Render up again, O tree (funeral-pyre), him that hath been deposited upon thee, that he may dwell in the seat of Yama, vidáthā vádan speaking (authoritatively) to his household.*<sup>1</sup>”

Thus far, it may not be doubted, the word appears in the language of ordinary life. But it is found to a very much greater extent in the sacerdotal sphere; indeed, as all interpreters from Yāska on have agreed, it often has a meaning very close to *yajñā*, ‘sacrifice,’ itself. This is as it should be. Inasmuch as the sacrifice is a private, home-affair, it is very natural that *vidátha*, the home, the premises, the establishment, should

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<sup>1</sup> The reader needs hardly to be reminded in this connection of the disturbances to which the early Hindu household seems to have been chronically subjected owing to the quarrels and disagreements of its members. A distinct class of charms, the so-called *sāmmanasyāni*, ‘charms to secure harmony,’ deal largely with this theme; see SBE. xlii. pp. 134 ff. ; cf. also the story of Cyavana (see ibid. pp. 362), in which these conditions are depicted as a curse.

figure prominently in connection with the sacrifice. But the word has a distinct local color. Just as in the view of people of fashion a house is the scene of social amenities (cf. especially the German expressions ‘ein haus machen,’ ‘ein grosses haus machen’), so the *vidátha* in which lived the generous patron of the sacrifice (*súrí*) is the scene of the sacrifice. This is especially clear in such passages as exhibit the word *yajñá* by the side of *vidátha*, e. g. RV. vii. 84. 3, *kṛtám no yajñám vidátheṣu cárūm*, *kṛtám bráhmāṇi súrīṣu praçastā*, “render ye (Indra and Varuṇa) our sacrifice pleasing in the establishments; prepare ye songs appreciated by the patrons (of the sacrifice).” Or RV. x. 100. 6, *yajñáç ca bhūd vidáthe cárur ántamah*; x. 110. 7, *yajñám . . . pracodáyantā vidátheṣu kārū (dáivyā hótārā)*; iii. 26. 6, *gántāro yajñám vidátheṣu dhírāḥ* (the Maruts); iii. 4. 5, (*dvárah*) *nṛpé-  
gaso vidátheṣu prá játā abhī 'mám yajñám ví caranta púrvih*; viii. 11. 1. 2, *tvám (agne) yajñéṣv īdyah*, *tvám asi praçasyo vidátheṣu*. In most of these cases the locative sing. or plur. of *vidátha* occurs with *yajñá* in a case other than the locative, rendering it clear that the sacrifice took place in the *vidátha*, and the assumed primary meaning, ‘establishment,’ with the understanding that it is the establishment in which sacrifices were offered, in which the sacrifice was at home, as it were, suits the connection most naturally.<sup>1</sup> And thus the great mass of the occurrences of the word. We may pick out, e. g., the passages in which Agni is spoken of in connection with the *vidátha*, and the same sense ‘establishment (in which sacrifices are performed)’ appears. Thus: RV. iii. 1. 1, *agne váhniṁ cakartha vidáthe yájadhyāi*; i. 60. 1, *váhniṁ . . . vidathásya ketúm*; x. 92. 2, *agníṁ vidáthasya sádhanam*; x. 91. 8, *vidáthasya prasádhanam agním*; iii. 3. 3, *ketúm yajñánām vidathásya sádhanam*; i. 143. 7, *vidátheṣu dīdyat*; iv. 6. 2, *agnír mandró vidátheṣu práchetāḥ*; iii. 14. 1, *ā hótā mandró vidáthány asthāt*; x. 122. 8, *grnánto agne vidátheṣu vedhásah*; x. 91. 9, *tvám . . . vṛṇate . . . hótaram agne vidátheṣu*; x. 11. 3, *agníṁ hótaram vidáthāya jíjanan*; iii. 8. 5, *játó jāyate . . . vidáthe várđhamānah*; iii. 28. 4, *ágne . . . táva bhāgadhéyan ná prá minanti vidátheṣu dhírāḥ*.

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<sup>1</sup> Decidedly, it should be noted that the word *vidátha* does not occur in the nominative at all, but overwhelmingly in the locative sing. and plur., whereas *yajñá* is very common in the nominative. The local color of *vidátha* can be realized superficially by comparing the two words in Grassmann’s Concordance.

A little differently, yet clearly enough, Agni in RV. iii. 1. 18 is said to have sat in the dwellings of the mortals, *vidáthāni sādhan*; or, in iii. 27. 7, Agni, the immortal god, leads the van, *vidáthāni pracodáyan*. Here it is difficult to determine whether *vidáthāni* still means, primarily, '(sacrificial) establishments,' or, secondarily, '(sacrifices in the) establishments.' Just as the Royal House of Stuart, or the House of Stuart means in reality the kings in Stuart's House, so *vidátha* unquestionably advances from the meaning '(sacrificial) establishment,' until it reaches the meaning 'sacrifice.'<sup>1</sup> This meaning may preferably be assumed for some of the passages relating to Agni, above; it certainly seems likely in the expression *trtīye vidáthe*, RV. ii. 4. 8: *púrvasyá' vaso ádhitāu trtīye vidáthe mánma gánsi*, "in remembrance of thy former blessings this prayer has been recited to thee at the third sacrifice." Here *trtīye vidáthe* seems pretty clearly = *trtīye sávane*<sup>2</sup> 'the third, or evening pressure of the soma.' The same three pressures of the soma seem to explain the word in RV. v. 3. 6, *vayám agne vanuyáma... vidáthesv áhnām... mártān*, 'may we, O Agni, overcome the mortals at the (three) sacrifices of the day'; cf. the expressions *prapitvé áhnām*, and *abhipitvé áhnām*, RV. i. 126. 3; iv. 16. 12; 34. 5, which point out the particular pressures in the morning and the evening stated collectively in *vidáthesv áhnām*; cf. JAOS. xvi. p. 38.

Indeed it is scarcely possible to mark off from one another the two meanings just developed. Take, e. g., the pāda, *sá no mr̥da vidáthe gr̥pnāá*, addressed to lightning, AV. 1. 13. 4: it may mean "spare us, thou that art praised in our household"; or, "spare us thou that art praised at the sacrifice"; or, RV. vii. 57. 2, *asmákam adyá vidáthesu barhír á vútáye sadata*, "sit down now (O Maruts), upon the barhis to refresh yourselves at our sacrifices," or, 'in our (sacrificial) premises.'

It would be useless, as it is unimportant, to attempt to catch or trace in such connection the more primary shading of the word, as this seems to me to be guaranteed by the passages discussed in the opening of this paper. Nor would it be worth while to

<sup>1</sup>Cf. also English 'court' in the two senses, regal and judicial; German 'hof,' etc., etc.

<sup>2</sup>So Oldenberg, SBE. xlvi. p. 205, and previously my own marginal note.

present here in writing the entire mass of passages in the Veda containing this word, in most of which the preceding meanings will be found satisfactory, in some of which the obscurity is due to the subject matter in general. But a few words on the derivative *vidathyā* will perhaps serve to further clarify the atmosphere.

By way of preliminary we again note that the word *sabhā* does not by any means always refer to a public place, but occasionally simply means ‘house,’ or ‘parlor.’ Thus *rayīḥ sabhāvān*, RV. iv. 2. 5, can hardly mean anything else than ‘wealth consisting of houses’; therefore, if not for other reason, *vidathyām . . . rayim*, RV. vi. 8. 5, means ‘wealth in the establishment,’ i. e. ‘established wealth.’ Nor does *yōṣā sabhāvatī vidathyā*, (RV. 1. 167. 3 (cf. also st. 6) refer to a woman in the assembly but means ‘a woman of good house and with an establishment.’ In this light we may regard anew a passage like AV. xx. 128. 1 = ÇÇ. xii. 20. 2, *yāḥ sabhéyo vidathyāḥ sútvā yájvā ca púrusāḥ*: what else may this soma-pressing, sacrificing man be but ‘a man of good house and establishment?’ In RV. 1. 91. 20 Soma bestows upon a pious man, in addition to cows and horses, a son (*vīrā*) that is *karmaṇyā*, *sādanyā*, *vidathyā*, *sabhéya*, and *pitrgrávaya*, i. e. the son is diligent or pious (*karmaṇyā*); devoted to home (*sādanyā*); obedient (*pitrgrávaya*); it seems altogether likely that *vidathyā* and *sabhéya* refer to home conditions rather than to public matters: the words seem here to have an ethical tinge, ‘genteel,’ ‘of a good house,’ or the like. There seem to be no passages, not even *vidathyāḥ samrāṭ* (‘a ruler rich in establishments’), RV. iv. 27. 2, in which the word needs to be correlated with any kind of public assemblage.